



Activation ceremony welcomes 2nd Engineer Battalion to WSMRBy Steve Ramirez Sun-News reporter

Click photo to enlargeLt. Col. Christopher M. Benson, left, receives the Army's 2nd... (Sun-News photo by Norm Dettlaff)«1»For more photos of the 2nd Engineer Battalion activation ceremony, visit our online photo gallery.

WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE — Until Friday, when the Army's 2nd Engineer Battalion was reactivated, White Sands Missile Range didn't need a parade ground on its main post.

But that will change as the influx of soldiers there continues to increase. Friday's ceremony was the first noticeable sign of change and growth that is coming to WSMR.

"Today marks a new chapter and new beginning," said Lt. Col. Christopher M. Benson, referring to the battalion he now commands. "It also marks a new chapter in the history of White Sands Missile Range. We all have one common goal, to support the war fighter."

From an area of desert grass adjacent to WSMR's Volunteer Park with the Organ Mountains serving as a dramatic backdrop, more than 200 soldiers in the battalion stood at attention. The makeshift parade ground served its purpose, but there were thoughts among some WSMR officials that a more traditional facility will be needed in the future

— especially if plans remain on track to bring a brigade of more than 3,500 soldiers to WSMR beginning in 2013.

"This is the sign of things to come," said WSMR spokeswoman Monte Marlin. "We're proud and excited to have these soldiers here."

It was an excitement shared by veterans who served in the 2nd Engineer Battalion during the Korean War.

"This is the most significant thing there is," said Jim Ditton, a retired sergeant who is past president and director of the 2nd Infantry Division's Korean War Veterans Alliance.

"Most of these veterans haven't been together since the battalion was deactivated in Korea in late 2004 when the colors (of the battalion flag) were burned."

For Gino Piazza, a retired major who served with the battalion in Korea, it was especially special for him to see the battalion flag flown again and its multicolored combat streamers swirling in the morning New Mexico breeze.

"It's a great day for me. I'm tired, I'm emotional," Piazza said. "It's absolutely amazing. I remember the camaraderie, the support among the battalion in Korea. No matter what we went through, they were always there for each other."

Col. Kent Savre, commander of the 36th Engineer Brigade, of which the 2nd Engineer Battalion is part, said that same kind of camaraderie and support is why the battalion is now at WSMR.

"The nearby support of the soldier-friendly communities of Las Cruces and Alamogordo is part of the reason why we're here," Savre said. "Those communities have provided superb support of White Sands Missile Range, and we're proud, honored and excited that we can be a part of that, too."